

All Quiet on the Western Front

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3. Ecclesiastes chapter 3. And if we read again at the beginning. Where Solomon writes, well-known words, to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die.

And then he says at the end of his poem, a time for war and a time for peace. A time for war and a time for peace.

As many of you in the congregation know, I speak to my father-in-law on the phone quite often.

[1 : 11] And you know that because what often happens is, when I'm preparing a sermon, my father-in-law will phone, and he'll phone me when I'm in the study. He's not disturbing me, but what he talks about is often what I'm actually preparing in my next sermon.

I've mentioned to you before that my father-in-law, he always asks me the question, how's your heart? How's your heart? Which is the question that Jesus asks us in the parable of the sower. Jesus asks us the question, how's your heart? Is it a hardened heart? Is it a hollow heart? Is it a hungry heart? Or is it, as we all hope, is it a healthy heart?

How's your heart? The other question my father-in-law often asks me is, kalasur, anything new? Kalasur, to which I would respond with my shameful lack of Gaelic.

I would say, well, khaniel kalasur, there's nothing new. But you know, my father-in-law's question, kalasur, it's also, in many ways, in the Bible. Because it's the same question Solomon is asking here in the book of Ecclesiastes.

[2 : 19] Because the book of Ecclesiastes, it's based upon the question, kalasur, anything new. And Solomon answers his own question, as we read in chapter 1. He answers his own question by explaining and emphasizing, khaniel kalasur von egrin.

There's nothing new under the sun. That's what Solomon says, there's nothing new under the sun. That's why, as you can see, the conversations I usually have with my father-in-law, they are simply, Murdo, how's your heart?

And then he asks me, kalasur. But the other day, when he phoned, I asked my father-in-law the question, is there anything doing with you? To which he replied, nothing doing here, all quiet on the western front.

Nothing doing here, all quiet on the western front. And you know, I actually had to ask my father-in-law to repeat what he said, because I had literally just written the title for my next sermon, All Quiet on the Western Front.

And like my father-in-law and all of us, we often use that phrase, all quiet on the western front, to explain that nothing's happening. But it's a phrase that we use almost without thinking.

[3 : 40] We use it with, almost without thinking of what it actually means, or what it really meant at the time. And I hope that this morning, as we look at this passage, that we'll see that the phrase, all quiet on the western front, it draws our attention to what Solomon is saying here about a time for war and a time for peace.

A time for war and a time for peace. And there are two simple headings this morning. There's no alliteration. A time for war and a time for peace.

So first of all, a time for war. Solomon writes, to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. And then he says at the end of his poem, a time for war and a time for peace.

Now the phrase, all quiet on the western front, it actually comes from a book. A book that was written about a decade after the end of the First World War.

It was written by a German veteran. He was a German veteran in the Great War and he was called Enrich Maria Remark. Enrich Maria Remark.

[5 : 01] And as a German veteran, the book was written from the perspective of a German soldier serving in the trenches during the First World War. And he was serving on the Western Front.

And you know, that perspective, a German perspective, is a perspective that we don't often think about. Because as British people, we don't think about the German perspective. And yet similar to Britain, many of the, and the other war nations that were involved, you know, many, there were hundreds of thousands of Germans who signed up to go to war and they never returned home. And for many of them, they joined a war that they didn't really understand and a war that they didn't really believe in. And that's what comes across in the narrative of all quiet on the Western Front. that thousands of young men who signed up to join the war, when they signed up, they were, in fact, signing their death warrant.

Because with every day that the war continued, the loss of life on both sides was increasing. And thousands were dying. And with the awful and the atrocious living conditions in the trenches, I'm sure you've seen it on history programs, and you've seen the trauma and the terror of war, the loss of life for family and friends, and with so much hurt and with so much heartache, so many of the serving soldiers on the front line, they began to wonder why.

[6 : 35] Why are we fighting at all? many of them, as it comes out in the narrative of the book, they could see the futility of fighting. They could see that war is really a waste, a waste of life, to the point that war seemed so pointless, so empty, so meaningless, and so futile.

to send people over the top into no man's land to be gunned down in a moment. It was so meaningless, so futile, so empty.

And in many ways, that's what Solomon is actually saying here in the book of Ecclesiastes. Because the book of Ecclesiastes, it's Solomon's sermon. And King Solomon, as you know, he was the wisest man that ever lived.

He had God-given wisdom. And the book of Ecclesiastes is a sermon about the preacher. That's what the word Ecclesiastes means. It means the preacher.

And in the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon the preacher is preaching a sermon about life. Because with all his wisdom, Solomon has looked at life. He's studied and scrutinized every area and avenue of life.

[7 : 51] And what Solomon has discovered, he's now written down here and disclosed to us in his sermon. And what Solomon says right from the outset of his sermon is that well-known phrase, vanity of vanities, says the preacher.

Vanity of vanities. All is vanities. Is vanity. Solomon introduces his sermon, this sermon, Ecclesiastes, with a memorable phrase.

And he repeats that memorable phrase, vanity of vanities. All is vanity. He repeats it throughout the sermon in order to keep our attention. But what Solomon is emphasizing and explaining to us, he's saying that life is vanity.

It's meaningless. It's pointless. It's empty. It's futile. Unless the Lord is in your life. Because Solomon says, in all his wisdom, he says, it's the Lord who gives you purpose in life.

It's the Lord who actually gives you a passion for life. And it's the Lord who gives you the point to life. Because the point to life, as our catechism reminds us, and I'm sure you know it, question one in the catechism, what is man's chief end?

[9 : 11] Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That's the point to life. And you know, Solomon in his sermon, he's asking us, do you actually want to know the meaning of life?

Everyone is searching for the meaning of life. They're all trying to find the meaning of life. But Solomon says here in his sermon, do you want to know the meaning of life? You need the Lord in your life. That's what he says.

You need the Lord in your life. Because life is meaningless when it's lived without the Lord. That's what he says. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.

And that's what Solomon is still saying when he comes to chapter 3. That well-known poem from Ecclesiastes, chapter 3. And Solomon is saying, he's reminding us and reaffirming to us, he's saying that every time and every season in our life, it's all pointless and purposeless without the Lord.

It's all pointless and purposeless without the Lord. And you know, it never ceases to amaze me that this 3,000-year-old sermon is still as relevant today as when Solomon first preached it.

[10 : 31] Because Solomon, he's calling us all, he's compelling all of us not to get sucked in and swallow the lie that this world can satisfy all the deep desires of your heart.

No, Solomon says you need to look at life. You need to love life. You need to live life with an eternal perspective. You need to think about what's beyond this world.

You need to think about eternity. You need to look at life and love life and live life with an eternal perspective. Because as Solomon emphasizes here, what's of utmost importance and what's of eternal value is your relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

my friend, what Solomon is solemnly affirming to you is that if you're not living your life with an eternal perspective, then you're wasting your life.

It's quite hard-hitting, isn't it? But that's Solomon's plea in his sermon. He pleads with us, he says, don't waste your life. Don't waste your life looking and loving and living for the momentary pleasures of this world.

[11 : 52] Why? Because life is precious. And we all know that life is precious. But life is precious, says Solomon, because your life is governed by time.

Your life is governed by time. That's what Solomon says in his poem. To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose, under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die. Solomon says that everything that happens in our lives, it takes place between these two times.

Two times in our life that are not governed by us. They are governed by God. Our time to be born and our time to die.

And undoubtedly, these two times are the most momentous moments in our life. Our first breath and our last breath. And it's between those two momentous moments, says Solomon, that all these other times and seasons take place.

[12 : 59] The time for planting and weeping and laughing and mourning and dancing. They're all governed. They're all governed by our God-given time. Our time to be born and our time to die.

My friend, it's something we probably don't think about often enough. But we're all governed by time. We're all governed by time. And what none of us will ever deny is that time is short.

Time is short. Which is why, says Solomon, why we must look at life and love life and live life with an eternal perspective.

Because if we waste our lives seeking satisfaction and security in all the P's of life, the P's of life, pleasure, power, promotion, publicity, position, and prominence, or even all the F's of life.

There are many F's of life. Fun, food, family, friendships, falling in love, fitness, and finance.

Nothing wrong with the F's of life. But if we waste our lives seeking satisfaction and security in all these areas and all these avenues of life, it will only end with the D's of life.

[14 : 17] The D's of life, disaster, destruction, devastation, and death. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher.

Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. It's all meaningless. It's pointless. It's empty. It's futile. Unless the Lord is in your life. Because it's the Lord who gives you purpose in life.

It's the Lord who gives you passion for life. It's the Lord who gives you the point to life, says Solomon. Even in the face of war. Even in the face of war.

You know, when Solomon said a time for war, he wasn't saying that there's a good time for war.

Because as we all know, there's never a good time for war.

We see that every day on the news with the war in Ukraine. You know, what Solomon was saying was that from an eternal perspective, war is a waste.

[15 : 19] And fighting is futile. Because in the end, it doesn't accomplish or achieve anything. all it brings are the D's of life.

Disaster, destruction, devastation, and death. And we see it on the news. The D's of life. Disaster, destruction, devastation, and death.

And you know, for a German war veteran, that was the message that Enrich Maria Remark wanted to get across in his book, All Quiet on the Western Front.

Because as a war veteran and having witnessed so many injured or wounded soldiers returning from the front line, having experienced some of them with PTSD, but it wasn't called that then, they had the trauma and terror of war.

And Remark himself, the writer, he said, we have so much to say, yet we shall never say it. We have so much to say, and yet we shall never say it.

[16:28] No one wanted to talk about the horrors of war. And that was the case on both sides. Even men from Lewis, we've all heard stories about them. They returned home, but they never spoke about the war.

Which is why Remark wrote his novel based upon the experience of war, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. And you know, remarkably, the book that he wrote, it sold two and a half million copies within the first 18 months.

And it was a book that was translated from German into 22 different languages. But because the book emphasized that war is a waste and fighting is futile, that book was banned and burned in Nazi Germany.

The book was written in the 1920s. By the 1930s, when Germany was under the dictatorship, rule, and regime of Adolf Hitler, the book, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, was banned.

And every copy that was found was burned because Hitler, he wanted war. He didn't want peace. Hitler was hungry for the peace of life, pleasure, position, prominence, publicity, promotion, and power.

[17:54] All the things that Solomon said are vanity, futile, and empty. And by the time Hitler committed suicide, he realized that for himself.

It was vanity, futile, and empty. But Hitler was hungry for them. So much so that as the Second World War began in 1939, it brought even more of the days of life.

Disaster, destruction, devastation, and death. But despite Hitler's attempts to ban and to burn remarks book, it remains to this day. And it remains with many even retelling the story.

They retell the story through music, as they've done over the past century, through TV. There was a TV program called *All Quiet on the Western Front*, but there was also a film.

And most recently, in the run-up to Our Mistis Day this year, Netflix released a film, the film *All Quiet on the Western Front*. And to be honest, the trailer of the film, the Netflix film, it's enough to send a shiver through your spine.

[19:10] The film is very well done, but I'll say it's not a good watch. And I say that because it's gruesome and it's gory. It's harrowing and it's heartbreaking.

It's disturbing and it's distressing. But it sets before our eyes the reality and the ruthlessness of war. But the emphasis of the narrative *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the emphasis of the book that Remarque wrote was that he would say that it's not a time for war.

It's a time for peace. It's a time for peace. That's what I want us to think about. Secondly, a time for peace. Solomon says, to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven, a time for war and a time for peace.

Enrich Maria remarks novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. It reaches its climax and culmination with the signing of the Armistice Treaty in November 1918. 1918.

[20:22] Because it was only when terms of peace had been agreed between both sides that the sound of gunfire would finally become all quiet on the Western Front.

Prior to the signing of the Armistice Treaty, the Allied armies, if you look through history, you see that the Allied armies, they had undertaken what was called the 100 Days Offensive.

And it was those 100 days that led the German army to collapse. And it also persuaded the German commanders that defeat was inevitable.

And so on the 8th of November 1918, a German delegation was sent to discuss terms of peace with the Allied forces. And the German delegation was headed by a German politician.

He was called Matthias Erzberger. And what they were told in the first delegation on the 8th of November, they were told to consider the terms of peace and they had 72 hours to consider them.

[21:27] But in many ways, the German army was in no position to refuse to sign. In fact, Matthias Erzberger, he's reported to have said to his delegation team that went to meet the opposition, he said, we have 72 hours.

Every minute we waste, there dies another soldier. Let us gain mercy where we can. But for goodness sake, let us make peace.

And it was this realization that defeat was inevitable, but peace was important. That was on the 8th of November. The 9th of November, the following day, Kaiser Wilhelm II, he abdicated his position as emperor.

And then two days later, on the 11th of November, 1918, the Armistice Treaty was signed at 5 a.m. It was signed between the German Matthias Erzberger and a French marshal, Ferdinand Foch. But you know, that signing of the Armistice Treaty, it always reminds me that that's what the gospel calls us all to do. The gospel calls us to sign and to make terms of peace.

[22 : 44] Our Bible reminds us that we are at war. We're all at war with God. Our sinful and our selfish nature has caused us and created this enmity with God.

And sadly, our foolish and futile war with God will only ever end with the days of life, disaster, destruction, devastation, and death. Our Bible says that the wages of sin is death.

But the wonder of wonders, and this is what I love about the gospel, and I want you to love it too, to love the gospel, that God has sent a delegation of peace. He has sent to your door a delegation to make peace.

God has sent an intermediary. He has sent a mediator. God has sent His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He wants to make peace with you through the blood of His Son, the blood of His Son on the cross.

You know, the wages of sin is death, but that verse doesn't end there. It has the best but in the Bible. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[24 : 00] And you know, the gospel, it calls us, and it commands us all and compels us to seek terms of peace. Seek terms of peace and be reconciled to God.

My friend, if you do not have reconciliation with God, then you need to seek terms of peace with God. You need to sign an armistice with God through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus, this is the wonder of it, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Jesus provides peace. Jesus promises peace. Peace through the blood of His cross.

My friend, do you have peace with God through Jesus Christ? Have you sought reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ? You know, we were singing about that earlier.

You sang it. you sang that we are to seek peace and pursue it earnestly. Those words were on your lips. Seek peace and pursue it earnestly.

[25 : 05] And that's what we're to do. We're to earnestly seek reconciliation and restoration in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Do you have peace with God?

Do you know, it's so important. Do you have peace with God? Because today, today is not a time for war. Do you know, sometimes I think with many of you, you need to put down your defenses. put down your weapons. Stop fighting against God. Stop resisting Him in your life. Stop with the excuses because it's not a time for war.

Solomon says here, no, today is a time for peace. Today is a time for peace. Today is the day to come to Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and seek reconciliation and rest and redemption and renewal through Jesus Christ.

Today is a time for peace. The time for peace. Do you know, when the Armistice Treaty was signed at 5 a.m.

[26 : 20] on Monday, the 11th of November, 1918, the treaty stated that the Armistice on the Western Front, it wouldn't begin until the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

Therefore, from the time they signed it at 5 a.m. until the Armistice would come into effect at 11 a.m., it would mean that there would be another six hours of fighting.

And during those final six hours of the Great War, the German army, what were they ordered? Keep moving forward and keep fighting.

You would think that with six hours left, you would just say, leave it. But no, they were ordered, keep fighting, keep moving forward. Which shows how much war is a waste and that fighting is futile.

Because by the time the clock struck the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, 1918, by the time the ceasefire was announced and everybody suddenly stopped on the Western Front and put down their weapons and the Armistice came into force and the sound of gunfire became all quiet on the Western Front.

[27 : 33] By the time that happened at 11 a.m., that morning alone, 2,738 men died on the Western Front.

And you know, as we said, the phrase all quiet on the Western Front, it's a phrase that we often use without thinking what it really means. We use the phrase to explain that nothing's happening.

But you know, the truth is, a lot happened on the Western Front. An awful, awful lot happened on the Western Front.

And it all happened before it became all quiet on the Western Front. As you know, the Western Front was a stretch of land. It was 400 miles long.

Weaving through France and Belgium. It was one of the main theatres of fighting during the First World War. But as one writer put it, and with this, I'll close.

[28 : 38] He wrote, shortly after the start of hostilities in October 1914, the Western Front froze into positional warfare. And at the end of the war, four years later, in November 1918, the front line had barely moved.

Three million soldiers had died on the Western Front, fighting to gain only a few hundred metres of ground. In total, he writes, almost 17 million people lost their lives in the first, just the first, world war.

Which is why, over a hundred years later, we still gather to remember the fallen and to thank the Lord for bringing us through one of the darkest centuries in our history.

But as we said, as we remember the fallen, we should always remember those who are still serving. Serving in our armed forces, whether on land or on the sea or in the air or under the sea.

And we should also remember those who have experienced the effects of war, whether mentally or physically, or families who have lost loved ones. Do you know, it's good for us to remember them, lest we forget.

[30 : 04] But you know, Solomon, he's also reminded us something this morning. He's reminded us that with an eternal perspective, war is a waste.

Fighting is futile because in the end, it doesn't accomplish or achieve anything. It only ends with the days of life, disaster, destruction, devastation, and death.

And war with God is futile. Fighting with the Lord resisting his gospel, rejecting his son.

Futile. That's why Solomon says to all of us this morning, you need to look at life. You need to love life. Life is to be loved.

You need to live life. You need to live it with an eternal perspective because what's of the utmost importance, what's of eternal value, what will last beyond your grave, is your relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

[31 : 14] Friends, to everything, there is a season. There is a time for every purpose under heaven. there is a time to be born and a time to die.

There is a time for war. But today, with God, is a time for peace. You need to seek peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy Word.

And we give thanks, Lord, that even though these words were penned thousands of years ago, that they're still relevant and they're still speaking. We thank Thee, Lord, that Thy Word is living and it is active.

And we pray that it would be living and active in our hearts and in our souls, that Thy Word would awaken us from our slumber, that it would speak to us powerfully, that Thy Spirit would apply it and bring forth fruit to Thine own glory.

[32 : 23] And Lord, help us, we pray today, to remember the fallen, to remember those who are still serving, but to remember that we must seek the Lord while He's to be found and call upon Him while He is near.

O Lord, speak to us, we pray. Help us to hear that our soul might live. Do us good, we ask, and go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning or this afternoon by singing the words of Psalm 46. Psalm 46 in the Scottish Psalter, page 271.

Psalm 46. Psalm 46. Psalm 46. Psalm 46. Psalm 46. We're singing from verse 8 down to the end of the psalm.

A psalm that's familiar with us. We sang it at the memorial service earlier on. A psalm that reminds us that the God we worship today still remains our refuge and our strength.

[33 : 38] But the psalmist in verse 8, he encourages us, he exhorts us to come. Come and do what? Come and see how the Lord makes peace.

And then he says in verse 10, be still. Stop rejecting, stop resisting, but be still and know that I am God. Why? Verse 11.

He's still upon our side. He's not opposed to you. He's not against you. He's for you.

And he wants to save you. So as verse 8 says, come. Come and behold what wondrous works have by the Lord been wrought. Come, see what desolations he on the earth hath brought. Down to the end of the psalm, our God, who is the Lord of hosts, is still upon our side. The God of Jacob, our refuge, forever will abide. These verses of Psalm 46 will stand to sing if you're able to God's praise.

[34 : 43] Come and behold what wondrous works have by the Lord been wrought.

Come, see what desolations he on the earth hath brought.

unto the end of all the earth, wars into peace he turns, the bow he breaks, the spear he cuts, in fire the chariot burns.

be still, be still, and though that I am God, among the heathen I, will be exalted.

exalted high on earth, will be exalted high.

[36 : 34] our God, our God, who is the Lord of hosts, is still upon our side.

The God of days, God of our refuge, forever will abide.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.

Amen.